

Committee on Children: Testimony in Support of Proposed Bill # 5144 2/26/09

Good Afternoon, my name is Noraleen Dunphy and I am the Director of the Nurturing Families Network Program at The Child Guidance Center of Greater Bridgeport. Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of the program and to obtain your support for Proposed Bill #5144 and the Children's Trust Fund.

As you are aware, The Nurturing Families Network is funded by the Children's Trust Fund, (CTF) the state agency created with the mission of preventing child abuse and neglect. The Nurturing Families Network is unique in that it is designed to engage families before a crisis occurs and to actually prevent abuse and neglect from happening; in effect, by identifying "high-risk" families and by supporting, educating and empowering them, the Nurturing Program helps parents create a stable household for themselves and their children, ultimately keeping them out of the "system".

There is no doubt that the consequences of child maltreatment are costly. According to Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA), the cost of intervening to help and of treating the medical and emotional effects of abuse and neglect cost our society over \$9.4 billion annually. However, preventing the abuse and neglect from happening in the first place will not only keep children safe and avert the consequences, but will save money.

A study by the Colorado Children's Trust Fund estimated that funding home visiting services to eligible families would cost \$32 million annually, compare that figure to their annual budget of \$402 million for CPS and the savings are staggering.

In other words, for every \$1.00 spent, \$12.00 is saved!!!

Our program in Bridgeport has the distinction of being one of the first in Connecticut. We have worked with almost 500 families since we began in January 1996. A lot has changed in the past thirteen years, but what has not changed are the struggles and difficulties the families of Bridgeport face and the real need for the Nurturing Families program to be expanded to all families.

Let me tell you a little about families who have participated in our Nurturing Program:

- 97% are single
- 55% are Hispanic
- 28% are African American
- 72% are between 16-19
- 82% are not employed
- 62% have not completed HS
- 80% are living in households at or below the FPL

Children living in poor households are 25% more likely to be abused and 44% more likely to be neglected than other children. Children living in poverty are also at greater risk for developmental, behavioral and health issues and more likely to become involved with not only the Department of Children and Families (DCF), but other agencies such as: the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of Mental Health and Addiction (DMHAS), the Juvenile Justice System and the Corrections System, just to name but a few.

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Currently, the program is only reaching a small percentage of families who would benefit. As a state, we must ensure that all children receive the nurturing and support they need to achieve their full potential.

Child abuse and neglect have damaging effects on the physical, psychosocial, educational and behavioral development of children. Research shows a clear correlation between child abuse and increased risk of dropping out of school, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency and adult crime. Evidence-based child abuse prevention programs, such as the Nurturing Families, actually save money in the long-term.

The Children's Trust Fund has made tremendous strides in developing not only the Nurturing Program, but other primary prevention programs and is the logical choice to remain the lead agency to continue to advance its primary mission.

As you begin your work today, we sincerely hope that you will recognize the need and the value of reaching all families before a crisis occurs and that you will vote to pass Proposed Bill # 5144

"An Act Concerning An Appropriation to Expand the Nurturing Families Network Program."